2:Purcell G-4 (no date) 1951 AL1 Southeast Asia AL1
Chinese
China AF1

Whilst thus simplifying the situation, it must be concealed that the Chinese social organization overseas early revealed serious deficiencies. It was not a complete unit of China transplanted, but fragments from various settings placed together in one spot. Different tribes and classes were put into unwonted juxtaposition, and the criminal and unruly element was disproportionately strong (this last fact needs emphasis). Embryo communal or municipal systems were often taken charge of by the deadly Triad society which used them for its own purposes. At the same time, too rigid a distinction has been drawn between the 'benevolent' *kongsis* and the 'malevolent' *huis*, or secret societies: it seems that the two were not separated in this categorical fashion and in fact were sometimes distinct associations with benevolent functions and Triad societies at one and the same time.[1] The shortcomings of the system became very manifest at certain times, as in Java when Chinese secret societies plotted to seize power from the Dutch, and in the Straits Settlements when these societies under the Triad societies got much out of hand and caused riots and practised intimidation for many years, later extending their activities to Perak where they added to the existing disorder until it approached anarchy.

This, however, is a special aspect of Chinese society in the Nanyang and is by no means typical. By and large, the Chinese were very law-abiding and gave the ruling Powers little trouble. Schlegel was right when he said that the Chinese were 'easy to govern'. Indeed this quality has brought them, at times, into the contempt of rough European individualists who have dismissed this tractableness as the characteristic of 'sheep'.

Students of the Chinese language who have ploughed through the *Tsŭ Erh Chi'h*, Sir Francis Wade's Documentary Series, will remember a number of memorials in which prefects or intendants

[1] The writer, after extensive experience of secret societies and district and clan organization, is sceptical of many of the theories advanced by observers. Schlegel (as we have seen in the chapters on the Kongsis of Borneo) has definitely regarded the Kongsis as a transplanting of municipal organization necessary to the functioning of Chinese society. Yet they were certainly 'secret societies' under Triad or Heaven and Earth League control. Only when countries, such as Malaya, began to legislate to control these societies was a distinction made between 'good' and 'bad' societies: the former were granted registration; the latter, if they functioned without registration, were illegal and, of course, definitely 'secret societies'. The writer is of opinion that a great deal more research into the matter is called for. (W. L. Blythe, 'The Interplay of Chinese Secret and Political Societies in Malaya', in *Eastern World*, March and April 1950, adds considerably to our knowledge.)

2:Purcell G-4 (no date) 1951 AL1 Southeast Asia AL1
Chinese
China AFI

of circuit of the Manchu dynasty related the details of criminal cases. There was a common offence which did not seem to come under the specific provisions of the penal code but was nevertheless heavily penalized, and it was known as 'being involved'. It appeared that to 'be involved', even quite innocently, in the felonies and misdemeanours of others, was itself in the nature of a crime. Indeed this feeling of the blameworthiness of being mixed up in any offence, tragedy, or lawlessness went right through Chinese society. It was not altogether unusual to hear of a Chinese man or woman hanging him- or herself on the doorpost of someone against whom they had a grievance in order to 'involve' him (there would be a judicial inquiry which would, at least, cause the owner of the door great embarrassment), for 'responsibility' is a far-reaching principle in China. This convention was hostile to the growth of public spirit, for a Chinese who saw a crime being committed, or a person in danger or needing assistance, would very likely do nothing for fear of 'being involved'.

This characteristic has persevered down to the present day, and, coupled with a willingness to pay for a quiet life, has been responsible for many Chinese difficulties. Chinese secret societies were able to parcel out the towns and villages in the Nanyang and to exact 'protection money' from shopkeepers and others without effective protest; in a similar way the Chinese community as a whole was willing to conform to all the laws and regulations made by alien Western Governments (whether to them they made sense or not) in return for being left alone. It was the social wisdom of 'Brer Rabbit, he say nuffin''. It was only when regulations proved to be unbearably vexatious that there was an outburst of hysteria followed by calm. This arrangement, convenient to both sides, was responsible for the saying of Gustaaf Schlegel cited above. It is an irony that this very quality, so convenient to European administrators in the past, as we have seen has brought down so much criticism on the heads of the Chinese *Towkays* in Malaya who, unprotected from reprisals, have paid 'protection' money to the Communist terrorists of their own race.

It seems true to say, then, that at the beginning of the twentieth century the Governments of Southeast Asia were conscious of the Chinese as a 'useful' element in their economic systems, and though they had some unpleasant social peculiarities they in no way constituted a danger or a threat. Chinese labour was introduced